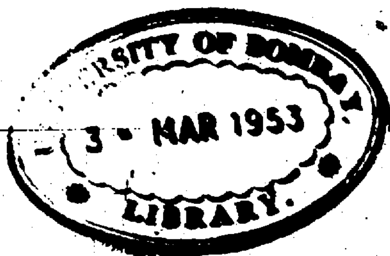
THE INDIAN SCHEME OF LIFE

By

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Introduction.

India achieving her political freedom, without any bloody conflict with her rulers but with an orgy of violence between her own peoples, and facing an unprecedented disparity of living standards between her classes, finds herself today completely bankrupt in her mind and spirit. The notion of the secular state is the inevitable reaction when religion is quickened and mobilised for social hatreds and killings. But this emphasises all the more the search for the true universal ground of both morality and religion in the Indian scheme of life. The modern philosophy of a secular state implies an exaggerated belief not merely in the all-sufficiency of economic goods, but also in the achievement or lapse of rightness in human relationships in the fields of economics and politics, of laws and institutions rather than in the domain of religion. This is the same intellectual slant that underlies Western Socialism or Communism, concentrating on the equalisation of the goods of life, oblivious of

the relations of means and ends, lower and higher values, and understanding equality and freedom only from the economic and political viewpoints.

The basic Indian postulate is that no good society is possible without good men, and that for the good society it is more important to form good understandings, affections and morals than to frame good laws and rights. Communion, mutuality and solidarity are the key-values and norms in both religion and society in India. Without accepting Rousseau's position that 'man was born free and is everywhere now in chains' the Indian view stresses that man is neither instinct-bound nor institution-ridden, and that his freedom, though a birth-right, can be attained only through a proper scaling of the four-fold values of life, wealth (*artha*), enjoyment (*kama*), righteousness (*dharma*) and self-realisation (*moksha*), and through a scheme of infinite duties and obligations grounded in this hierarchy. "Dharma, artha and kama are to be equally striven after ; and one who pursues a single goal deserves censure", says an ancient text. Desire (kama) as such is not



to be condemned. It is Dharma which sustains and uplifts the world (dhārana) and invests the transient and immediate desires and passions with eternal and ultimate values. The drive or energy emerging from desire is Divine as it sheds the passion for enjoyment, indulgence or anger. Desires and pursuits for marriage, family, wealth and happiness that are not dissonant with Dharma become essentially real and divine, says the Bhagavad Gita. Thus do Deity and Dharma interpenetrate with desires and activities, transformed into obligations and consecrated as rituals. Such obligations with which every man is born in India are presented practically and metaphysically in the form of four-fold myth of Sacrifices (pancha-mahāyajna), re-enacting the supreme primordial Sacrifice of the Progenitor—as he created the multiplicity of the world out of His Oneness—as the means of restoring that Oneness in each individual life. These obligations embrace the raising of family, or perpetuation of the biological heritage (pitri-yajna), the advancement and propagation of learning and culture or the perpetuation of the spiritual heritage

(rishi-yajna), and sharing and compassion to fellow-men and to fellow-creatures or the perpetuation of the symbiotic heritage of Nature (nri and bhuta-yajna). It is a profound sense of solidarity with the entire universe or cosmic symbiosis that underlies the Indian code of morality. Religion, metaphysics and morals alike proclaim com-munion, sharing or solidarity as the *leit motif* of individual and social culture.

From this emerge the master notions regarding social integration and stratification, viz., that degrees of culture, sociality and moral responsibility determine rank, power and prestige (varna); regarding the distribution of wealth and the goods of life, viz., that the individual's enjoyment is the "residue of sacrifice" (yajna sistāmrita), and that if he appropriates and enjoys wealth without previous gifts to the world, he is punishable as a thief; and, finally, regarding the individual's status and role, viz., that each kind of labour has its own dignity and sacredness, each station has its appropriate duties which indicate man's specific way to perfec-

tion based on his psycho-genetic personality (svabhava) and culture (guna).

The same law of integral harmony in the cosmic and the social order (rita, dharma) is the law of individual maturation and perfection (svadharma). The principle of cohesion and solidarity of groups, classes and strata is the law of infinite depth and extension of the human personality. Social justice (sāmya) becomes thus an episode of the development and perfection of character in the individual through achievement of perfect serenity (sama) and identity of pleasure or pain or equality of fellowman with himself (sāmya, samadarsana, ātmaupamya). The Mahābhārata says: "With up-lifted arm here am I shouting forth and yet nobody listens to me. Doing others good is the highest virtue and the greatest wrong is to oppress others". India has depended far less than any other social culture on laws, tehniques and constraints for group harmony and for prevention of domination of class over class and of man over man. She has aspired after producing good men, who through a real

sharing of life, an effective mutuality of experience, produce the good and just society. Today she finds that caste men are not good men, and caste-society an unjust and evil society. In the centuries of her political subordination, caste, no doubt, served as a most effective defensive mechanism for the people whose capacity for collective action was restricted and enfeebled through the encroachment of foreign legislation and administration. Modern caste rigidity is the inevitable result of the forces of disruption in a society, which has wellnigh lost its initiative and capacity under foreign rule, and yet has to solve the problem presented by the presence of diverse stocks and races at various stages of social development. But caste has become incompatible with the sharing of the goods of life of the modern community. It must now make an effective compromise with modern democracy.

Such adjustment is already discernible at two ends of the Indian caste ladder. In the case of such high castes, such as the Brahmans, the Kayasthas and the Vanias, function has ceased to be the



dominating factor, and the tendency towards the formation of new large social groupings is especially strong. This has produced a more liberal outlook which has been especially encouraged by Western education and social ideals from which these castes have profited most. Thus they have assimilated with ease the new nationality idea. At the lower end of the social ladder the occupational castes have absorbed as easily groups, dissimilar in ethnic origin or domicile, on the basis of their common calling, hunting, fishing, pastoral pursuit, or agriculture or handicraft. The considerable majority of Indian castes are functional and their social status roughly depends on their caste calling or the degree to which it is lucrative and respectable. Some artisan and trading castes, especially in South India, have expanded into guilds, co-operatives or federations on the basis of community of occupation or trade. In this respect these functional castes resemble the artisan, business and professional classes of the West, and their planned development somewhat on the lines of guild socialism might adapt them to new demands.

Unfortunately, at the lowest rungs of the social ladder where the primitive, vagrant, hunting and food-gathering peoples were being gradually assimilated into the Hindu fold, the virulent, segregative and disruptive aspects of caste, untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability—the unholy gifts of animism to Indian culture—have conspired with increase of population and lack of land and of remunerative occupations in maintaining about one-fifth of the Indian population as submerged, depressed and impure.

The liberalisation of caste and its assimilation with the principle of Indian nationalism has now to be socially planned and perhaps promoted effectively by a religious-mystical movement similar to what had swept among the Indian masses prior to the British rule. This was jeopardised with the advent of foriegn education and way of living and of the new class structure grounded in wealth and economic disparity, associated with new economic conditions. In an era of new economic opportunities, castes may expand on the basis of community of economic

interest into large regional and functional bodies and associations that may revitalise their ancient capacity of self-direction and management for the common good, including punishment of social deviation, craft government, regulation of fair wages and fair prices and even organisation of poor relief. Indeed, in this manner caste may solve the most difficult problems that Indian democracy is now faced with, viz., the lack of active citizenship among the masses and the representation of minority groups. This will be in any case a more adaptive and wholesome social procedure than the orientation of functional groups into "classes" with their strong "class consciousness", which even in the West has never created more than a political party nor superseded nationalism.

Thus India may plan a caste re-orientation in such manner as it may shed its vicious medieval separatism, absorb the nationality idea, maintain and adapt its self-government to the larger needs of economic and political life, and become assimilated into the substance of a peasant demo-

cracy. But she can do this only when she realises in her social mind an organic and spiritual ordering of society, based on a graduated standard of culture and sociality (varna), and dignity of labour or vocation and service (svadharma) for all. For varna truly is not colour, nor race, nor heredity but social and moral fitness for sharing or service. A class-less society must suffer from "social entropy"; for it is the elite intellectuals, artists and mystics who alone can formulate new values and ideals and give a new impulsion to society. Besides, it is they alone who can prevent a secular class-less community from being constantly driven by group conflicts and struggles for power and domination. In the varna scheme, privilege and power belong to those who are endowed with a supreme sense of justice, love and spirit of humanity. The highest varna is the custodian of the eternal truths, values and laws of the land. The quadritype division of society into four social-personality groups (varnas) is a universal law as found by both ancients, such as the legists of India and Iran and Plato of Greece and medieval scholastics like Thomas Aquinas. Modern

thinkers like Wells, Bertrand Russell, Berdyae, have also suggested that industrial civilisation will show less class conflict and personal disorganisation if leadership and governance rest with the elite (varaniya), seers, thinkers and sensitives, endowed with the highest moral and spiritual attributes. In the new social gradation which is now in process in India, she will bestow the same privilege and status to men of learning and character as in the past. The saint, the mystic or the bhakta may be an outcaste but he is a privileged person above all conventional functions. Such is the true metaphysical meaning of varna which also includes the notion of the sacredness of manual labour. In the future society we must get rid of the stigma of manual labour that has paralysed Indian civilisation, and give a new dignity and prestige to the life and toil of the humble peasant and worker. Varna is the law of healthy society offering character, learning and work free entry to the highest social stratum, and rejecting personal differences in respect of wealth, possession and employment as the criteria of social gradation.

India envisages the law of individual perfection and group hierarchy (varna) in such a manner as is applicable to all men and nations. The Law is uncreated, eternal and universal (nitya, sanatana) as it binds samsara, the world of births and rebirths, of incomings and outgoings. But the same eternal Law pitches the wagon of samsara to the stars. In his arduous journey of life, the mortal pilgrim as he proceeds from his youth, marriage and vocation (grihastha dharma) to renunciation, meditation and compassion to all as a prelude to life's termination in samadhi (sannyas-asrama), he combines silence with activity, karma with prajna. His life is not of flight and final deliverance and release, but of compassion, consecration and productiveness. Morality here becomes easy and spontaneous although the mundane moral distinctions of varna and asrama completely disappear. At the summit there is neither varna nor asrama, neither conscience nor religion; there is an all-pervasive identity-consciousness, with pity, benovolence and compassion as its emotional correlates.

India's holiest word is neither Knowledge nor Yoga, nor Love, but Compassion (karuna). Man, infinite, universal and eternal through finiteness, specificity and change, sees the infinite in the finite and finite in the infinite, and therefore silence (akarma) in action (karma), and action in silence. This is the familiar ethical doctrine of Ātmaupamya or identity of self and creature (Sarvātmabhāvā) of the Bhagavad Gita, whence flow profound non-attachment or resignation (sannyāsa) in action and service of fellowmen with all-compassion (anukampā); for in every sentient creature the presence of the Universal Man or God is realized. In Mahayāna Buddhism the identification of Nirvana (enlightenment) and Samsara (the world of births and deaths) by the Bodhisattva, who loves and serves for the sake of love and service on the basis of supreme detachment and understanding that in Bodhi nothing dual exists, nor is any notion of self present, similarly supplies the moral inspiration and zeal for compassion and benevolence for millions of Buddhists in South-east and East Asia. This doctrine has its Brahmanical counterpart in the theory of Sarva-

mukti, according to which all beings are destined to obtain release so that evil is ultimately conquered and hell is emptied of its sufferers. The Mahayāna Buddhist doctrine, however, throws the onus of universal salvation on the moral adventure of the Bodhisattva. The prevalence of Bhakti cults in medieval India with its emphasis on the Divine grace and compassion also engendered a strong sense of human brotherhood embracing the fallen and the ignorant. The easy access to God's mercy bred an unflagging interest in lost human souls and a zealous endeavour to leave none out of the ambit of His redeeming love. All this completely transformed the configuration of the Divine personality through the all-too-human needs of succour and security. The benign and gracious (aghora, dakshina, sada-siva) aspects of the Deity have thus been incorporated into the idea of the Holy, with its pregnant symbols and gestures of protection and beneficence (varābhaya)

The same attitude has been responsiblefor the appreciation in popular consciousness of the Universal Mother-God not merely as pure consciousness

(chetana) and all-pervasiveness (vyapti) but also as perfect goodness (sivā), as all compassion (daya) and as perfect beauty (kanti). The three absolute values of modern philosophy, Truth, Goodness and Beauty, are realised and felt through positive, self-transcending love and service.

The major contributions of Indian religion and metaphysics to the elevation and refinement of the modern democratic process are three. First, the truth that Man is Universal (Vaisvānara). To respect the majesty and dignity of the Real, Universal, Common Man, absolutely every common man, is the supreme truth. The Man Universal is the true, eternal expression for human freedom and equality, for justice and goodness in all human relations and institutions and for sharing, service and solidarity of all groups and classes.

Secondly, the truth that the voice of the people or of the majority need not be the voice of God, because the categorical imperative of the first principle may be violated or disregarded. The Universal Man or God is revealed only to man as

and when he stands alone in his profound detachment from self and from the people—before his Real or Universal Self or God. A God-loving individual cannot be overpowered by a standardised crowd or mass mentality and the vote of the majority. Mahatma Gandhi, the supreme and shining example of democratic leadership in India, followed "the still, small voice of God", rather than the strident voice of the majority in the National Congress whenever he felt that the majority was standing for might rather than for right. And with his isolation and loneliness before God he led the Indian nation. The reconciliation of these two metaphysical principles is the ethical task before Indian democracy to-day.

Thirdly, the way to such reconciliation is the truth that the most profound fulfilment of man's self is his rejection of group, party or class principles and interests as absolutes and assertion of the most extensive, abstract group—the Universal Community. The voice of the people can approximate to the voice of God in so far as men, constituting

groups and communities, think and act as universal men. The supreme values of man are those of communion, love, compassion and solidarity. These also build up the most harmonious State and the most integrated Community. Thus are men, groups and institutions transformed and transfigured by the truths and values of the Universal Man—the sage in action, sovereign and self-luminous, (swarat, atmadvipa), the Jivanmukta, the Bodhisattva or the Bhakta, the moral ideal of India through the ages.

"May all beings view Me with a friend's eye may I view all beings with the eye of a friend", says one of the earliest of sages in the Yajurveda.



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The Significance of the Myth and Symbol of Sacrifice

The social ideals of a culture are vividly expressed in myths and symbols. Myths are neither fantasies nor illusions but with their images, imaginary actors and situations become foci and repositaries of the dominant moral and spiritual values of a civilization, and guide the behaviour of the people along channels that transcend reason and intellect. Similarly symbols record in an abbreviated, condensed manner mental imageries, full of emotional potency and unconscious meaning and suggestions, and easily and unerringly import certain basic, subtle and even beyond-human values into everyday human relations and activities. The ancient Indian myth (itihāsa) of the creation of man, society and the four functional groups in the spiritual hierarchy presents poetically the values and ideals of life with com-

pelling authority and universality. "That which was One" in the beginning multiplies Himself into His many children by supreme Sacrifice. As He creates mankind, He also creates the organic hierarchy of groups with their appropriate vocations, roles and duties. The latter are also called Sacrifices to be undertaken in this world as expiation by mortals. Through Sacrifice, man, society and groups are created, and through Sacrifice again the mortals not only safeguard the fulfilment of their life goals but also assemble together the dismembered God and his multiplicity ; for in essence God is One.[1]

The wheel of the cosmos is thus set in motion and maintained by the Divine Communion and Sacrifice. The Sacrifice (Yajña) is the Indian symbol of creation and its processes. It is a constant reminder to man of the laws of his being and self-sacrifice as a part of the cosmic plan and purpose. It is the Yajñas comprising the different classes of duties making up man's life in the world which lead

1. *The Mahābhārata*, Anuśāsana Parva, 48, 3; also the *Bhagavad Gīta* III, 10-12, IV, 23-32.

to dharma, and it is dharma which leads to the Divine. Man is enchained by the consequences of karma unless the karma approximates to dharma—a Sacrifice offered in the sacred fire of knowledge of himself, of cosmos and of the Divine.

An excellent early interpretation of life with its manifold desires and interests as a sacrificial ritual, (yajñadarsan), full of cosmic meaning and purpose, and hence sanctified is that of Ghora Angirasa to Krishna in the Chhāndogya Upanishad. "When one hungers and thirsts and has no pleasure, that is his initiation; when one eats and drinks and takes one's pleasure, that is his participation in the sacrificial-session; when one laughs and feasts and goes with a woman that is his participation in the liturgy; when one devotes himself to austerity or penance or is generous or does right or does no hurt or speaks the truth; these are fees to the priests, wherefore they say, He will beget and he has begotten and that is his being born again. Death is the final oblation." Man's enjoyment of pleasures in his brief span of life is a ritual and a sacrifice that conquer his finiteness

and mortality. Accepting finiteness and mortality like God, he yet attains the Infinite, the Eternal and the Divine by participation in Sacrifice at the altar of life's duties and obligations. The Sacrifice undertaken on the earth is a sacramental re-enactment of what was done by the Progenitor in the beginning of creation, but its goal or purpose is opposite. In and through the Sacrifice, the Creator dismembers Himself and creates his children. Through the Sacrifice the children of the earth put together (samskār) the dismembered Creator, build up the simplicity of the One Single Person, Purusha or the Absolute.

The Cosmic Symbiosis underlying the Five Sacrifices

The Purusha Sūkta in the above manner prescribes the theory and art of Self-sacrifice as constituting the true worship of the Divine, the recapitulation in each individual life of the Sacrifice of Virāt Purusha to Himself; while the device of four different kinds of Yajña was evolved in India to direct the various forms of self-sacrifice in a manifold code

of duties and obligations. The distinction between the once-born and the twice-born individual (dvija) in India rests on this that the former's re-birth is physical from the "altar" of impulse and reproduction, while the latter's re-birth is spiritual, *i.e.* from the sacrificial altar of duties and obligations. To undertake the sacramental mimesis is to be born. Says the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad: "As yet unborn, verily, is the man who does not sacrifice." Or, again, he is a brute if he holds that the deity is one, and he another; the means of reunification as well as the Deity Himself are the Sacrifice.

Four different kinds of Yajnas with their different sets of moral imperatives for each individual are envisaged: Yajña of Tapas (penance), Yoga (meditation), Svādhaya and Jnāna (study and knowledge). The Yajurveda as well as the Aitareya Brāhmana hold that man is born with three debts, debts to Pitris, Rishis, and Devas, and these he can discharge only by fatherhood, yajña, and study, as "Putrī, Yajvā, and Brahmachārī". Later on two other debts and obligations are added—those to fellowmen (Nri-yajña) and to animals (Bhutayajña).

The Indian myth of the Five Obligations and Sacrifices (panchamahāyajña) is a generative master notion in morality and culture, and makes work a sacrament for everybody. Man commits sins consciously and unconsciously. His conscious sins include five-fold aggression and killing (pancha suna) of insects and animals, his many sentient associates in the common habitat due to his use of pestle and mortar, grounding stone, broom, fire and water. He can be absolved from such sins only by the performance of the Five Sacrifices or Obligations. These five obligations, according to the familiar myth charged with cosmic meanings are: obligations to gods, to ancestors, to spiritual teachers, to fellowmen and to animals with all of whom men live interlocked lives. A chain of reciprocal duties and services binds together all creatures in the cosmos. This is the basic concept for the moral order. It is imperative that such debts are to be repaid by every person through the performance of five obligatory sacrifices (Yajña). These, sacrifices are: sacrifices to the gods or worship, sacrifices to the spiritual teachers *i.e.*, cultivation and advancement of learning, sacrifices to ancestors, *i.e.*, procreation and upbringing of the family and transmission of faith and culture, sacrifices to fellowmen, *i.e.*, love, sharing and service, and, finally, sacrifices to birds and animals, *i.e.*, love, care and devotion to the welfare of all sentient creatures.

Man's daily round of activities becomes neither empty nor jejune, but gains in full symbolic meaning and significance and is entirely denuded of self-reference when it becomes a sphere of ritual of infinite indebtedness or obligations, encompassing and organising the entirety of his values, interests and activities. A man of no sacrifice upsets the cosmic symbiosis of nature, earth, man, culture and Deity, and is a thief, since he enjoys the gifts of the cosmos without offering anything in return.

The Bhagavad Gīta gives a symbolical, moral interpretation to the notion of Sacrifice by regarding all human activities as well as their results viz. wealth, enjoyment and power as sacrifical offerings to the Divine; eternal knowledge and bliss accrue to the mortals as "sacrificial residue." There can be no private enjoyment

of property as such; it is only the residue that remains at the termination of the ritual of infinite obligations which is meant for individual appropriation and enjoyment. Wealth, power and happiness first offered to the gods and to sentient beings and then enjoyed by mortals as "remnants of sacrifice" are their elixir[1]. Sacrifice is the universal inescapable law; those who offer no sacrifice can obtain neither sacrament nor self-enlightenment and salvation. He is verily a thief who enjoys the gifts of the gods for his own satisfaction without giving any return to the gods, from whom he derives them in the form of his various obligations to the ancestors, teachers, fellowmen and lower animals (Yajñakarma). On the other hand, when the gods are nourished by Sacrifice, they bestow on mortals the enjoyment they desire. The Bhagavad Gīta observes: "Men have rights only to what is required of their sustenance; one who appropriates more is a thief who is punishable"[2].

1. *The Bhagavad Gīta* III, 13 and IV, 23-32 ; vide especially Madhusudan's commentary.

2. *The Bhagavad Gīta*, VIII, 14·8.

In Hindu scriptures Sacrifice is used in a generic sense as knowledge, action, works and *elan vital* that maintain the continuity of life, the Cosmic Person being at once the Lord of the Sacrifice and immanent in the universe which is born of the Sacrifice.

Even in the Upanishads that stress the mystical illumination of the Real Self, the ethical significance of the five cardinal sets of social duties and obligations is equally brought out. The Taittīriya Upanishad lays down the following virtues as necessary for the aspirant desirous of self-realisation : study and teaching of the Vedas, respect for law, truth, penance, self-control and tranquillity, offering of daily oblations to fire, charity and compassion and the obligation of bearing offspring.

The Buddhist Myth of Sacrifice

Akin to the Brāhmanical myth of Sacrifice of Virāt Purusha, and similarly potent in its implications of cosmic obligations and virtues, is the Buddhist myth of Sacrifice of the Bodhisattva. Gautama, the historical Buddha, went through a

series of sacrifices in his previous births as a Bodhisattva until he attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Gaya. The myth of Bodhisattva's sacrifice is developed not in Hinayāna but in Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Bodhisattva does not accept the ideal of final release, sensitive as he is to the sorrow of the world, but makes this pious resolve, in the words of the Avatamsaka Sūtra: "For as much as there is the will that all sentient beings should be altogether made free, I will not forsake my fellow creatures", or, again, in the words of the Lankāvatāra Sūtra, "the Bodhisattva is alive to his original vow flowing out of the all-embracing love that is in his heart. He does not enter into Nirvana (as a state separate from the world of Becoming); he knows that the visible world is neither abjured nor Nirvāna preferred. In the illumination of the supreme knowledge there is neither bondage nor deliverance." Such is the final contemplation (dhyāna) of the Bodhisattava. In the most important Mahāyāna scripture, the Saddharma-pūndarika or the Lotus of the Perfect Truth, Buddha is described as the Lotus of the Creation, servitor of the world,

but not belonging to it, making the lotus flower unfold in every human heart. Man here takes the vow of allegiance to truth, compassion and sacrifice that ultimately realise in the communion of the saints the Kingdom of the Buddhas on earth. Having reached Nirvāna and refused its fruition, the Bodhisattva remains on earth as an Adept, invisible to the uninitiated mankind, to watch over, serve, and protect it from sorrow and misery.

This grand Mahāyāna epic of goodness, tenderness and beauty which poignantly expressed the immeasurable pity and compassion of Buddhism gave birth in India, Further India, China and Japan to innumerable sculptures and paintings with their marvellous apparitions of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The mystic gestures of these superhuman heroes of sacrifice, depicted in all their glory and tranquil sweeetness in painting and sculpture and the various legends of miracles of compassion wrought by them in the name of salvation, have elicited goodness, devotion and sacrifice of the common people for many long centuries. Such is the power of a

myth that generates innumerable, cosmic archetypal images of universal goodness in popular religion, art and poetry—superhuman apparitions whose pure, fresh waters of wisdom and compassion are used to sweeten the bitter waves of that mighty sea of sorrow formed of the tears of men.

The Universal Four-fold Ordering of Society

The myth of the Divine sacrifice elicits harmony in the human and cosmic order in more than one way. The four functional groups or varnas in India are regarded as emanating during creation from the different limbs of the Cosmic Person (Purusha). By their conformity to their specific functions and obligations the varnas serve to maintain the cosmic order (Rita or Dharma) and thus realise and re-enact, each in its own stratum, the Divine sacrifice. Ancient myth makes the Indian social structure quadritype. This sociological speculation has much to be said for it; since the human community everywhere seems to be divisible into four levels or grades of mental make-up and experience, comprising respectively the seers, sen-

sitives and spiritual leaders (Brāhmans), the politicians, administrators and technicians (Kshatriyas), men in the productive occupations and intermediaries (Vaishyas), and the lower group of manual workers including the de-classe (Sūdras). In the Indian cenception the human species itself is divisible into four grades or varnas. In the body politic of a particular community the roles and functions of each varna are equally significant; social harmony and stability can be safeguarded only when each group remains loyal at its own level to its predispositions and experience, and lives up fully to its vocation without attempting to overstep the limits governed by nature or svavhāva. Such an organic or spiritual hierarchy of groups (varnas) into which a society may be divided, according to the types of human personality (svavhāva) provides the essential basis of harmony and justice in social organisation. Thus the gradation and conformity to jobs, occupations and functions according to the four basic groups, 'born of their own natures', is the norm or dharma of society, deviation from which is adharma in the sense of contrariety to both the social and cosmic order,

While caste or class represents an actual datum in social history, varna is the universal, normative four-fold ordering of society conceived on the basis of degree of culture and sociality, and hence rooted in the cosmic law of equilibrium or dharma.

The four-fold ordering of society is met within many other social cultures. The theory of an organic or spiritual gradation was conceived also in ancient Iran and in Europe by Plato, Aristotle and some of the medieval scholastics. It is rooted indeed in the formation of groups and adoption of vocations according to natural dispositions and attitudes with differences in moral standards corresponding to the degrees of sociality and of moral responsibility reached. Many distinguished modern thinkers such as Nietzche, Eucken, Simmel and Wells have stressed the notion of a natural functional hierarchy, where there is a downward movement of privilege and knowledge; whereas in the social stratification of many countries, as we find today, privilege, power and prestige extend through the upward movement of the individual. Hierarchy is not

social segregation or coercion. As Simmel observes, "hierarchical tyranny is generally far greater in a democratic state than in a monarchy".

Culture *versus* Heredity or Colour as the Basis of Social Hierarchy

On the other hand, where the determining factor of varna is not vocation or culture, but race, colour or wealth the principle of righteousness in the natural hierarchy is violated. Most Western scholars misunderstand the Indian theory focussing their attention to the divorce between the philsophical notion of varna and the actual social practice in which heredity, race and colour formed the basis of the social hierarchy. In the Mahābhārata we read that "righteousness and not birth is the cause of the division into varnas", and again, that "the whole world had been formerly of one varna and the four orders came to be established on account of their conduct and vocation." After enumerating the characteristics and virtues of the four orders, the Mahābharāta adds that if these were not to be found the Brāhman would be no Brāhman, the Kshatriya

no Kshatriya, and so on. Similarly the Bhagavad Gita also stresses that natural aptitude and culture are the basis of the functional gradation.

The emphasis in the Gita, the most important single scripture of Hinduism and the epitome of its wisdom, of the duties and virtues of the four varnas and of the characterstics of the two categories of individuals, angelic (daiva) and demoniac (asura) has been of far-reaching import in the country. In India through the centuries there had been a see-saw struggle between the trend of caste crystallisation, based on social or institutional rather than organic or spiritual hierarchy, and the egalitarian trend, rooted in the conception of the infinite worth and dignity of the universal man, that recurrently challenged the traditional social stratification. In the broad the alternation between social rigidity and mobility accompanied or was a phase of the alternation between ceremonial or institutional religion and simple, direct, intuitive experience of Reality. Indian society witnessed this when Buddhism protested against formal ritualism and sacrifice and proclaimed supremacy of the moral law; when the Bhagavad Gita stressed the freedom of religious experimentation, intellectual discrimination, mystical devotion and self-transcending dedicated work against scholasticism and the religious routine; when the galaxy of Saiva and Vashnava acharyas as well as the philosophers, Sankara and Ramanuja, rescued the creative, spontaneous spirit of religion from the dogmatisms and disputations of canonical literature; and, finally, when the saints and Bhaktas of the later centuries mingled their profound ecstasy with supreme knowledge in work, worship and love. As religion became less of a creed and dogma and more of living experience and adventure, it transformed the social structure and opened new vistas of opportunities for the many—those who are poor and pure in heart and see God.

In the Bhagavata Purana, that became the fountain head of various mystical Bhakti cults which were socially levelling, the differences between the four traditional varnas were minimised, while those men who were characterised by aggressiveness and violent impulses and absence of piety, were relegated to outside the pale of the four varnas. Sankaracharya,

who led the movement both against decadent Buddhism and the abominations and excrescences of Hinduism, and made Vedānta the foundation of Hindu revivalism, stressed that in self-enlightenment or realisation of the universal man neither varna nor its rites exist, and that man can reach perfection from the very fact of his manhood[1].

The Law of Hierarchical Relations

In the Indian metaphysical conception of Dharma a task or duty, naturally and properly performed according to the uncreated, eternal law of the cosmos, is righteous, virtuous and meritorious, leading to perfection (svadharma). Adharma or unrighteousness is in India theologically and ethically neutral; it is simply non-conformity to the essential nature of beings, determining by virtue of their inherent qualities and dispositions how they should conduct themselves either in a general way or in relation to their vocation (varna) and stage of life (āsrama) in an ordered hierarchy. We read in the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad that Dharma is fiercer than

[1] *Brahma Sūtra,* III. 4,38

the fierce breed of the Kshatriyas. By Dharma even the weak defeats the stronger, as if by an appeal to the king. Verily this justice is the same as truth (satyam)[1]. Dharma in its double aspect of knowledge and practice controls all men. Sankara comments that an ignorant man identified with righteousness, in order to practise its particular forms, identifies himself with one or other of the castes, Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya or Sudra, which is the pre-condition of that practice, and these are naturally the means that qualify one for the performance of sacrifices.

Dharma, like Brahman in Indian thought, is a notion of many-sided import. Metaphysically speaking, Dharma is Rita or the cosmic binding order, the eternal truth holding its sway over universe, in the words of the Arthasāstra. Buddhism emphasised both the metaphysical and moral aspects of Dharma. Dharma analysis is "the discernment of an eternal, orderly, conditioned sequence of things", in the words of the Suttapitaka. Dharma practice

[1] *The Brihadāranyaka Upanishad,* I, 4, 11.

is the Law of Altruism, complete, balanced and practical, as embodied in the Eight-fold Path and based on the laws of unity, continuity, metempsychosis and transience. Dharma as the primordial norm sustaining the universe in Rigvedic and Buddhist thought and underlying and harmonising all differences becomes transformed in the Epics and the Puranas, into the realisation of the immanence of the Deity. Dharma's eternal root principle becomes the knowledge that the supreme Deity dwells in the hearts of all living beings. Psychologically speaking, Dharma is that from which proceed prosperity in this world and eternal bliss hereafter, according to the Vaisesika Sūtra. Morally speaking, the four feet of the powerful and perfect Dharma are truthfulness compassion, spiritual discipline and charity; and, again, harmlessness, truthfulness, absence of the tendency to steal, to be free from the passions of desire, anger and covetousness, activity in the direction of what is agreeable and good to living beings form the course of Dharma, common to all varnas, according to the Bhāgvata Purana. Sociologically speaking, Dharma is the code of life for the individual pursuing the four-

fold values of life (dharma, artha, kāma, moksha) according to the category of his stratum in the spiritual hierarchy (varna) and the stage (āsrama) of his life. Thus we speak of the dharma of the individual (svadharma), the dharma of the varna and the dharma of the asrama, and again of the dharma of attachment (pravritti) and of renunciation (nivritti). Legally speaking, Dharma is what is propounded by the Brahmans, the good people (sistas) and elders who sit in assemblies of their respective vocations and professions. But "whenever the sastra is in conflict with rational law (dharmanāya), then reason shall be held authoritative; for there the original text (on which the Dharma has been based) is not available," says the Arthasāstra. Finally, for the mystic, all Dharma points to the Deity, all knowledge, activity and silence refer to the Deity, and dharma itself is abandoned for the sake of the Deity. "Forsake all the Dharmas thou hast and seek refuge in Me Alone", enjoins the Bhagavad Gīta. "All knowledge finds its end in Vāsudeva; all meditation refers to Vāsudeva; all Dharma ultimately leads to Vāsudeva; and all attainment culminates in Vāsudeva",

says the Bhāgvata. The Prapanna Gīta similarly stresses: "Lord, I know what Dharma is, but I cannot practise it; I know what adharma is, but I have no power to desist from it. Thou, O Lord of the senses, dwellest in my heart and I do as Thou dost impel me to do." From every point of view dharma is mānavadharma, eternal and universal, the basic law and first norm of the Universal Man and the Universal Community.

Dharma applies to all levels or spheres of existence conceivable, the law of integral harmony applying to the cosmic and the social order as well as to the specific course of development of each single individual. It is Dharma which defines, therefore, not merely the whole order of the cosmos in its infinite levels and cycles but also the specific law of individual life (svadharma), which however imperfectly carried out is more resplendent, than that of another, however well carried out. Adharma is not "sin" or "evil" in the Western sense, but a complete disequilibrium or destruction of hierarchical relations in the cosmos when at any point discord is established; for meta-

physically the total equilibrium of the cosmos cannot be distrubed. This is why the Gīta is so strong in its insistence upon the law of hierarchical relations. By his own work (svakarma) that embodies externally his inherent qualities or tendencies and hence what is his own dharma, man praises Him from whom all beings (or, all his powers) are projected, and by whom all this (Universe) is extended. "Better is death in (the fulfilment of) one's own law (svadharma); for to follow another's law is perilous". The Bhāgavata Purāna reiterates this: "He who has his mind and intellect cleansed by the performance of his own dharma and has fully realised My Nature, attains knowledge and wisdom and in a short time reaches Me. This is the righteous course of conduct of those that are in the pale of the varna and āśrama system. And that course, united to devotion to Me, becomes the best means of attaining moksha."

Dharma, the Principle of Social Equilibrium

There is in organic or spiritual society (varna) neither struggle for power, privilege and prestige

among the vocations nor maladjustment of individuals and groups in respect of their reciprocal interests, goals and jobs. Each individual finds his proper vocation, role or status in society. Each group finds a stable equilibrium as its power and privilege correspond with its sociality, social conscience and social responsibility. Man finds his self-fulfilment in his true vocation. He belies his own moral norm if he wishes to adopt the way of action of another social group. In the upper groups man's social conscience, sacrifice and sharing constantly call for service to the people lower down, whose unsocial or anti-social dispositions are diseases of the body politic. "A Brāhman is one who is friendly to all", says Manu,[1] and it is to him largely that the monastic life is open. The true social hierarchy conforms to the principles of differentiation of social functions according to the dispositions and aptitudes of individuals that determine their qualifications for the specific functions of each group. In the traditional Indian conception there is a level or order of existence for each individual or group of individuals,

1 *Manu Samhita,* II, 87,

the maintenance and perfection of which are the keys to both personality development and social integration. This is the universal Dharma of societies, grounded on the cosmic law or reason.

Just as Dharma or Rita, the principle of integral equilibrium or the eternal law of the cosmos defines the respective duties of men flowing from their varnas or roles and vocations in society governed by their inherent qualities or character (guna) and culture (karma), so it also assigns duties appropriate for each of the four stages of their maturation—childhood, youth, old age and end of life. It is in this sense that the notion and design of the varnasrama are regarded as eternal and universal, embodying the full realisation of man's social and spiritual destiny, and bridging the gulf between samsara and moksha.

The Law of the Stages of Life (Āśramas)

The scheme of the four stages of life (āsramas), stations or stages, each with its proper kind of discipline and toil (śram, literally arduous toil), defines

for each individual appropriate rights as well as duties and obligations. The duties and obligations are regarded as yajna. The personality matures and integrates itself through the stages of (1) student-disciplineship in the first or the Brahmacharyāsrama (literally in which "one walks with Brahman"), where self-control and knowledge are acquired in childhood (jnana-yajña), (2) marriage and occupational activity in youth (Grihasthāsrama), which is the field for the practice of various social duties and obligations in complete self-detachment and spirit of consecration (karma yajña), (3) with-drawal from society, meditation and life of relative poverty and service (Vānaprasthāsrama) in which the individual makes his beginning for the final aim *viz.* salvation (moksha) and (4) complete renunciation (Sannyasāsrama). From station (āsrama) to station in the arduous journey of life the pilgrim proceeds in his course of deliberate control and planning of life, first learning self-discipline and the essentials of true knowledge, then pursuing the goals of wealth and skill in the vocations (artha) and family and other interests of life (kāma), later on, as

he matures, retreating from the family and society, and practising meditation and penance and charity and compassion to all as a prelude to total renunciation as the means of total self-fulfilment, and, finally, terminating life in samadhi by yoga (atma-yājña or brahma-yajña). It is noteworthy that Plato assigns the end of the individual's life to the contemplation of eternity and Being, if men are to crown the life they led here with a corresponding lot there.

Such is the sequence of obligations and virtues (yajna-parampara) that enables the individual in the Hindu scheme of life to seek and fulfil the manifold interests of life, integrated and graded in the light of the eternal verities and ultimate values without that imbalance, excessive specialisation and hypetrophy in the pursuit of limited, fragmentary and proximate goals of life that dwarf and mutilate personalities in many social cultures. We have referred to the deeper, more comprehensive, spiritual interpretation of yajña in the Bhagavad Gita as symbolising through self-knowledge the identifica-

tion of self with the cosmos, the Absolute or Brahman that translate all work into sacrament, and all the senses, disciplines, experiences and possessions into ways and means of unfoldment of the Universal Self. The Wheel of Action in the cosmos can be kept in continuous motion only through Sacrifice that gratifies the gods and shows the way to self-enlightenment, rather than through self-enjoyment that is wicked and contrary to the symbiotic scheme of living[1]. All activity becomes silence (akarma), man not having lost his identity with Brahman with which also all goals and means become merged. This contemplation is known as identity-consciousness (ahamgraha). Worship, self-transcending knowledge and silence in action become here part and parcel of the same experience. Though man remains active, he becomes no longer bound by the chain of activities, goals and consequences, for in these are also realised the supreme eternal values; while his inactivity becomes the complete silence or absorption of the Alone in the All.

1 The *Bhagavad Gita*, III, 16,

This larger interpretation of yajña makes it possible for persons of all shades of opinion, temperaments and stages of life to live in the Divine, each with his distinct mode of Sacrifice that is the universal law of the cosmos. The man of the world or the self in its alternation of samadhi and awakening can therefore enjoy the values of life without any craving or attachment. His work, social duties and obligations offer him the supreme bliss attainable after the completion of such work or sacrament (Yajña-śistamritabhuja).

While the Dharmasāstras bestow high praise upon the second stage of life stressing that the householder can achieve the goals of the next two stages viz. complete self-enlightenment, while at the same time discharging important social obligations and providing the much needed support for the three other āsramas, it is also clear that a person can renounce society and adopt the homeless, ascetic, peripatetic life at any time. The most distinguished example of comparison and contrast between the householder and the ascetic is that

between King Janaka, disciple of Yājñavalkya, who lived a life of complete detachment and served his kingdom and people, and Yājñavalkya himself, the spiritual teacher *par excellence*, who ultimately renounced the world and adopted the life of a Sannyāsin, but not before teaching his wife Maitreyī the means of self-enlightenment. India has always given a higher status and prestige to the Sannyāsin, who has abandoned all and has neither shelter nor possession, nor practises any rites than to the householder (grihastha) who marries and practises a vocation. Yet one's own "station" and its duties (svadharma) have also received great emphasis in Indian ethics. The Maitri Upanishad says, "One must be a fervent seeker (tapasvi) if one is to know God or even achieve success in works, but he cannot excuse himself from the appropriate duties of his station merely by claiming to be such a fervent." There is no doubt that the struggle for living and the pursuit of wealth and comfort is subdued and moralised as all men are directed to look up with solace and confidence to total renunciation and conquest of death and of the chronic phobia of death at the

last stage of solitariness, renunciation and meditation; while the presence of many in society who have preferred anonymity, a loin-cloth and a begging-bowl for wealth, luxury and status is a constant reminder of the supremacy of the ultimate values. Besides the super-social Sannyasāsrama, gathering as it does individuals from castes, high and low, who obtain the highest adoration in society, mitigates the rigours and acerbities of caste differentiation. In Vānaprastha and Sannyāsa there is no varna. As a matter of fact while the varna divides society the āsrama serves as an equalising and integrating force in the social culture.

The Hierarchy of Values (Purushārtha)

The entire scheme of duties and obligations of strata and stages of life (varnāsrama) rests on a proper scaling of the values of life (purushàratha) that are defined in India in a four-fold manner. The cherished goals of wealth and enjoyment (artha and kàma) of the householder are duly subordinated to the laws of righteousness and self-realisation (dharma and moksha). The last viz. self-realisation (moksha) com-

prises the supreme eternal value which regulates, integrates and harmonises all activities, interests and duties of life. There is accordingly a conjunction of all the values of life—dharma, artha, kāma moksha. Where dharma and worldliness regulate each other, there is a synthesis of all goals. Dharma or the cosmic principle of harmony and righteousness maintains, conserves and regulates all social activities and institutions seeking the goals of wealth and enjoyment (artha and kāma), and directs these to self-enlightenment and salvation (moksha). Through dharma followed unflinchingly and determinedly within the moral boundries of the four varnas and four asramas, moksha can be attained in samsāra or the world of births, deaths and re-births. The Mahānirvāna Tantra observes: "That which leads to salvation (nirvāna) is also productive of the fulfilment of righteousness, wealth and enjoyment (dharma, artha and kāma)". Thus does self-enlightenment or salvation encompass and transcend all the values of life, including wealth, vocation and pleasure. But the Hindu emphasis of the *summum bonum* has varied in different epochs of

social and religious development. Often is it stressed that the final goal of life, viz. moksha can only be attained through liberation from the pursuit of the three other goals, viz. enjoyment (kāma), wealth (artha) and the responsibilities of social life (Dharma) in the order of their gradation.

Man the Universal

It is metaphysics defining the relation between self, non-self and Deity that ultimately governs all the duties and obligations in the Indian scheme of life. Morality in India is considered as a matter of inner spiritual discipline and meditation rather than external social form and regulation. Both metaphysics and ethics affirm the principle of an equal participation of all men in the Universal Self which is the Fullness, (Pūrnam), 'indivisible and yet divided among creatures'. The Bhagavad Gītā analyses the stages of man's cultivation of the most extensive communion between self and non-self. "He who sees with equality everything, in the image of his own self, whether in pleasure or in pain, he is considered a perfect yogi." True self-knowledge is nothing more and nothing less

than man's consciousness of identity with all creatures and with the Universal Self or Supreme Reality, which abides in and comprehends them all. Such a mystic vision is accompanied on the moral plane by lapse of the sense of the finite, particular self and by profound detachment in action that becomes consecrated and creative through love, sharing and solidarity. Man who is a minute speck of the cosmos is at the same time a cosmos, a beggar who is at the same time the Supreme Lord, and a muddy vesture of decay which is at the same time a vehicle of the eternal values. Such is the metaphysical mystery that Indian religious thought designates when it says that man is universal (Nara-Nārayan) and that the value of the person, his dignity and rights are akin to those of God.

Truth, Goodness and Love as Absolute Values

It is from man's infinitude and universality, his identity with the entire sentient world (sarva-ātma-bhāva) that there flow profound detachment in action and self-transcending love, compassion and service. The way of knowledge is also the way of

service or sharing. Indian widom stresses the rhythm of action and withdrawal, of service and silence in a total experience of enlightenment in which the "true" of metaphysical thought and the "good" of social action are inseparably fused.

The bhakti ideal particularly stresses love, sharing and solidarity i.e. prefers ultimate salvation to immediate salvation. For the bhakta, the absorption in the feet of the Lord or complete self-surrender is salvation, and participation in God's work for the world become his supreme duty. In the Bhāgvata Purāna, Rantideva says: "I do not desire the most supreme condition (salvation), nor the eight kinds of success (yoga achievement), nor the cessation of birth or samsāra; I solicit the sorrow of all living creatures through interpenetrating into them so that all creatures become free form pain". Kabir says: "Thou (God) art merged in all—but I would not utterly be merged in thee". Not salvation or release, but the perpetual presence of God is dearest to the bhakta heart. "Grant me", cries Dadu, "Oh! grant me the vision of Thyself. I desire

not salvation". Tulsidas puts its more positively: "The same salvation for which the jnāni exerts so much comes to the bhakta against his will." The various Bhakti cults stressed the complete self-surrender of man (prapatti) to the Divine grace (prasāda) that in its incomprehensibility and sportiveness (lila) forgives all-too-human sins, misdeeds and blemishes. There is therefore no distinction between a Brāhman and an outcaste in the eyes of God whose grace is spontaneous and spills out in infinite measure to those who sin and suffer.

Social Levelling and the Bhakti cults

God in Bhgāvatism suffers with all the evil and imperfection of man, and the Divine self-surrender of love requires from man, God's partner in creation, reciprocating love, service and sacrifice. Thus do love and service keep the whole creation moving, in which God and man are bound to each other in eternal, self-transcending ties and there is no deliverance of either. And love, compassion and service belong to all caste-men, high and low, and indeed

the greater the sinner, the greater is the opportunity for receiving God's prasada and of reciprocating it.

Mystical experience reveals to the bhakta a dual movement, of the Spirit of man God-ward and of God man-ward. Thus the devotee sings "Love is my golden touch—it turns desire into service; earth seems to become Heaven, man to become God." "For the sake of this love heaven longs to become earth, and gods to become men". And, again, "The common man is God who shares the common lot with man, labours and sweats for his bread. He shares the soil with his plough and sows and grows his crops that wave in the golden sun; he reaps and gathers grain by grain, does all but not for himself." Rajjāb, the disciple of Dādu, sings, "God-man (nara-narāyana) is thy definition. It is not a delusion but truth. In thee the infinite seeks the finite, the perfect knowledge seeks love, and when the form and the formless (the individual and the universal) are united, love is fulfilled in devotion".

Great egalitarian movements touched the hearts of millions in India emanating from various mystics and

saints who took to the way of love, compassion and bhakti in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries. Many of them like Rāmānuja, Rāmānanda, Mādhava, Jñānesvara, Chaitanya, and Vallabha, no doubt, worked and preached within the fold of caste and thesocia l order, but they sponsored liberal social trends proclaiming obliteration of caste distinctions and complete equality in matters of worship. Rāmānanda preached his doctrine of bhakti in the vernacular to all castes, and to all men and women and had among his twelve principal disciples a barber, a cobbler and a Muslim weaver. Chaitanya admitted into the spiritual brotherhood the Muslim devotee Haridās as well as the Kāyasthas, Rupa and Sanatana; while his devoted follower, Nityānanda, took the revolutionary step of admitting all castes without any distinction into the brotherhood. Again, Rāmānuja, though a Brāhman like Chaitanya, also took the unprecedented step of proclaiming and fighting for the privilege of the untouchable castes of entering the temple in Mysore. Many saints emerged from the Sudra and untouchable castes, such as Kabir, Dādu, Rāidas, Dhannā, Nāmadeva, Nanda, Ravidās

and Chokamela. Their mystical fervour and devotion spreading among the lower social strata contributed to free them from the domination of the Brāhman priesthood. Caste hypocrisy and Brāhman imposture were courageously exposed by some. Kabir says, "If God wanted you to distinguish between high and low caste, then why did He not put the insignia of three lines on the forehead as you were born? At birth every body is a Sudra, and continues as such for some time. It is the artificial sacred thread by which you bring conflicts into the world. The functions of life, internal and external, are the same for both. How, then, will you distinguish between Brāhman and Sudra?" Again, "It is needless to ask of a saint the caste to which he belongs. The barber has sought God, the washerman and the carpenter. Even Raidas was a seeker after God. The Rishi Swapacha was a tanner by caste." In the same strainTurasidas (in the Niranjini) observes: "The cloud of vārnāsrama has overcast the sky and the sun of true, unlimited knowledge is not visible any more". Again, "it is karma and karma alone that distinguishes the Brāhman, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya,

the Sudra, and the woman from one another. The distinction applies only to the man of action. The man of silence (nikarmi) cannot be distinguished either by name or by residence". And, again, "Why is this distinction between a Brahman and a Sudra? Both are moulded out of the common clay from the same revolving potter's wheel and by one Almighty potter." During these centuries there were at least two notable attempts of a wholesale revolt against the caste system. One, in Mahārāshtra, proved unsuccessful since the followers of this sect were contemptuously treated and bitterly hated by all castes, and it even gave rise to a new caste of the Mānbhāvas.[1] The other, in the north, was eminently successful. It was in the same period of religious mysticism and egalitarian movement against caste and the Brāhmanical social order that the Sikh community emerged in the Punjab, and gradually grew into a strong military nation, welded together by Moghul persecution. Sikhism condemned caste and in the Sikh community there was to be no priesthood. Each head of the family performed rights of baptism, marriage and

1. Bhawe: Maharashtra Saraswat, quoted in Ghurye: *Caste and Race In India*, p. 95.

other ceremonies, while the congregation could be led by any member of the community. Guru Nanak declared, "It is mere nonsense to observe caste and feel pride over grand names."

The traditional social structure underwent from the 13th to the 15th century a profound transformation which focussed and intensified the forces that were bringing about new caste alignment for several previous centuries. The dynamics of varna and caste has to be adequately understood and appreciated. In Vedic India the social stratification was based upon the supremacy of the Aryan people over the indigenous inhabitants of the country, the Dravidians, whom they subjugated. The highest rank was accorded to the Kshatriya group comprising the rulers, warriors and landholders, and the lowest to the cattle-breeders, cultivators and traders—the Vaishyas. Below them, outside the pale of the Aryan society, were the Sudras, to whom were assigned manual labour and craftsmanship and the Nishādas, Dasyus, Dāsas, Asuras and Pisāchas, representing the wild aboriginal, hunting, fishing and

other groups. Yet the Vedic texts clearly recognised the right of the Nishādas, the non-Aryans and the depressed classes of those days, to participate in sacrifices and study the Vedas along with the four higher castes. They are described as of dark brood (Krishna-garbha) and nose-less (anāsa). Thus differentation of race and colour, bright (aruna) and dark (krishna), must have formed the basis of the social stratification; and as a matter of fact originally there were only two varnas, the Aryas and Dasas. At the same time varna is explained as 'elite or chosen' (varaniyam) by several Vedic commentators, indicating that culture and spiritual attribute or essence rupa visesham) went into the roots of the social ordering rather than race or colour. The Taittiriya Brāhmana observes: "The Brāhmanvarna is sprung from the gods (devas), the Sudra from the titans" (asuras).

After a few centuries there was witnessed a a shift in valuation. This was the out ome of two factors. First, the Brāhmans asserted themselves throughout the Aryan culture as teachers, law-givers and statesmen, and were accorded the highest rank

prestige, higher than even the ruling noble and land-owning class, the Kshatriyas. This happened probably in the 6th century B.C. as a reaction against the upsurge of Buddhism that represented in its genesis a Kshatriya movement in its opposition to ritualism and priesthood, and its liberalising tendencies, admitting the Sudras to higher religious knowledge and also to rituals. Buddha again and again stressed that a true Brāhman is not one who is born in the Brāhman caste but he who behaves as a Brāhman. "The station of a Brāhman", he says "is not due to birth but to abhorrence of the world and its pleasures." The Buddhist order was thrown open to all castes; examples of low castes being admitted like the Nobles and Brāhmans were Upāli the barber and a vultare-tormentor. All castes and classes, except the Chandālas were admitted to instruction in the universities and educational institutions of the times[1]. Buddha was the first great Indian Protestant to restore and re-interpret the true metaphysical theory of varna in its functional and spiritual sense. In the *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Buddha

1 See Mookerji: *Ancient Indian Education* pp. 395, 482.

presents the functional view of varna grounding it on a certain Dharma "The Lords of the fields (Khetta, Khattiya) came up originally to a certain Dharma. Or again as princes, they attracted folk by the Dharma they upheld. Again, certain humans, distressed at the sins of society, retire into woods to meditate, or dwell outside the towns, making books. Now these, putting away evil, came to be called Brāhmans. There were also men distinguished from others, solely because in thought, word and deed they came up to a certain human Dharma. Others again, leading domestic lives and proficient in certain industries, thereby fulfilling a different standard, are called Vessas (Vaishyas), and others again, passed muster only in minor or low crafts, and became known as Suddas, these too only differing from other people by a certain Dharma. Now there comes a time when a Khattiya, a Brāhman, Vessa, or Sudda, misprizing his own Norm, goes forth from his home into the homeless life, saying: 'I will become recluse'. And thus the class of recluses comes into being, differing from others only in the possession of a special Dharma."

At the time of Buddha the status of the Brāhmans was somewhat lower than that of the Kshatriyas, who also proved their intellectual worth by formulating various metaphysical doctrines, including those of Buddha and Mahāvira. But the Brāhman-born, whom Buddha criticised, gradually asserted their supremacy. There were probably bloody Kshatriya-Brahman conflicts as indicated in the legendary battles between Vasistha and Visvāmitra, between the Brāhmans and Janamejaya, between Arjuna and Bhrigu and in the killings of Parasurāma. Both Buddhism and Jainism led to the rise into prominence of new ascetic, mendicant or wandering orders along with the older ajivikas and sramanas, as contrasted with the Brahman forest-dwelling hermits and of monachism and large-scale desertion of households for the celibate and contemplative life. Hindu society reacted to this peril through the stress of Brāhmanical intellectual standards and of the obligation of the householder to lead the contemplative life of the sage (muni) in old age.

But the decline of the Kshatriya or warrior group was soon to be speeded up by the invasions of success-

sive hordes of invaders such as the Sakas, Yavanas, Palhavas, Kushāns and Huns for well-nigh seven centuries beginning from the third century B.C. in the course of which the old Kshatriya group was totally exterminated. Foreign Saka and Hun tribes took advantage of their political power to obtain recognition as new Kshatriya groups by affiliating themselves with ancient Kshatriya clans, and accepting the traditional regal ritual of coronation and horse-sacrifice. Foreign immigration and invasion led to the varnas getting considerably intermixed, as recorded in an Andhra inscription of the second century A.D. During the same period we find king Satāvāhana Pulumayi of foreign extraction being extolled for his success in preventing the admixture of the four varnas. New castes were, however, continuously formed as the result of the assimilation of the Aryan groups with the invading tribes, many of whom embraced Bhāgavatism or Vaishnavism since the second century B. C. A shining example is the conversion of Heliodorus, the Greek envoy, who became a devotee of Vishnu and erected a garuda column of Vāsudeva at Besnagar. Such

new castes, products of admixture (varnasankara), included the Mlecchas and the Ajīvas (artisan groups) according to the Vāyu Purana (not later than 500 A.D.) as well as the Vrātyas and Vrisalas of Manu's classification, dated about 400 A.D. The latter are usually regarded as approximating to the Greeks or Yavanas and the various immigrant Mleccha tribes that could be assimilated into Hinduism after the observance of the Vrātyastoma ritual.

Secondly, there was even greater racial admixture at the bottom of the Aryan society, while the occupations of the Vaishya and of the Sudra from the Dravidian rank also merged in one another. Neither the Vaishya nor the Sudra is mentioned as a separate caste in either the Vedic or the Buddhist literature. The Vaisyas formed the Aryan common people, while the Sudras who were described as timid, miserable, servile and owning no property in the Purānas and the Māhabhārata were the indigenous inhabitants of India, subjugated by the Aryans and assigned low status in Aryan society in exchange of manual

labour and servitude. The Dasyus, obviously the primitive tribes of the forests, who ate the flesh of dogs and killed and ate cows, were given a yet lower status.

There was a fresh attempt at social gradation at the bottom even in the more liberal Buddhist period, when to the lowest rungs of the social ladder were relegated Hina-sippāni, or low trades, such as those of the weaver, the potter, the barber and the tanner and the Hina-jātiyo, or low tribes, who were recruited obviously from the forest folks or Dasyus and followed such occupations as hunting, fishing, fowling and scavenging. Both these categories corresponded to the varnasankar as or mixed groups below the Sudra castes as described later by Manu.

Hindu society expanded across the centuries in India through a gradual process of social assimilation of aboriginal and forest folks rather than through subjugation and expropriation. These were included in the Hindu fold as they gave up impure animal foods, abandoned nomadism and pillage in favour of agriculture, tanning, leather work or farm labour

and adopted certain customs in respect of marriage and worship. But in this process of absorption many lagged behind. These were gathered into castes that were regarded as low and unclean in the Hindu social scale.

Liberal Tendencies in Hindu Social Organisation

We accordingly see that there have been striking shifts in social valuation. One was obviously associated with the ascendency of the Brahman caste over the Kshatriya nobility occupying formerly the highest rank and with the emphasis of knowledge and spirituality, throwing the door open for all castes to the highest status in the age of Hindu liberalism. Another shift is related to the social recognition of the Sudras who rose to be kings and also high state officials in the beginning of the Christian era, as recorded in the Purānas. The Mahābharāta mentions that the king's ministry should include along with Brāhmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas three Sudras and one Sūta. Not merely the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata (especially the Bhagavad Gitā)

but also particularly the several Puranas were composed with the special objective of general education of the Sudras and the women-folk of India. The Bhāgvata Purana observes that for women, the Sudras and the fallen Brāhmanas the Vedas are inaccessible, but the Mahābhārata is provided for them by the sage Vyasa in compassion. The Vīramitrodaya says that the Sudras can obtain self-enlightenment through the study of the Puranas. Many of the later Puranas with their liberalising tendencies merged in the Bhāgvata religious reformation of the middle ages, that contributed to further improve the role and status of the Sudras. Many saints and mystics such as Bāsava in the 12th century, Rāmānanda in the 14th, Kabir in the 15th, and Nānak, Dādu and Chaitanya in the 16th proclaimed the social equality of all those who were admitted into their order. Among them Kabir strongly denounced the caste system. It was only the Chandālas that through the centuries were avoided and segregated, as recorded by the Chinese travellers and by al-Biruni who mentioned that impurity was also extended to foreigners in the north-west towards the end of the Gupta period. The

Devala Smriti, dated about 900 A. D., dealing with the problem of enticement and enslavement of persons within the Hindu fold by the Mlecchas, the Chandalas and the Dasyas enjoined their purification and return on their performance of a krichhavrata; and women ravished without their consent were treated as becoming pure after three nights' interval and unwilling mothers after delivery of their children. The Matsyapurāna declares that it is improper for a ravished women to be condemned because the ravisher alone is guilty. Such was the reaction of Hindu society to a period of Mleccha violence and social outbreak. The justice and forbearance underlying the ritual of bringing back abducted or ravished women into the Hindu fold remain yet to be learnt by modern Indian society. Right at the bottom of the social stratification, the Sudras were obviously given a status and privilege by the Purānas and the Smritis of the later centuries, not accorded to them by the Manu Smriti, for instance. The Sudra varna gradually split up into a large number of functional castes, all ranked below the Vaishya, their social status and rôle being largely determined

according to Brāhmanical predilections. The Sudra is now used as a general appellation for all social groups of lower status than that of the Vaishya. A third shift in valuation is in progress, connected with the gradual advance and absorption of primitive tribes as the result of their economic uplift and social progress and their relegation to the lowest rank as the process of assimilation is left incomplete. But this movement has been checkmated by increase of population under British rule in the last few decades and excessive economic pressure on the land, making it most difficult in many areas in India for the forest-dwelling, vagarant and criminal castes to stabilize themselves in agriculture or in other suitable remunerative occupations.

In the well-knit Hindu social hierarchy governed by the metaphysical principles of social order and righteousness, it was the Sannyāsi group that through the centuries set the accepted pattern of values and determined the social prestige of different roles and vocations. Outside the range of this social ranking, dominated by ritualised intellectual standards of the

Brahmans, the gradation of the occupational groups, that today form the considerable majority of the Hindu castes, largely depends upon the economic and social progress from hunters, fishers, food-gatherers, nomads, thieves and beggars into permanent and settled cultivators and artisans, and in the artisan groups upon the adoption of improved craft methods and techniques of trading. It is thus even in static society economic improvement is associated with the improvement of social rank based on the valuation of labour, wealth and sedentariness. Such is the existing caste gradation in India dominated by the stress of both ancient, ritualised and intellectual and modern, flexible and economic standards that have tended to mix together in the densely populated plains of India, subjected to a long series of immigrations and racial and cultural assimilation of peaceful folks living side by side for centuries.

But there has been hardly any proselytising movement led by the ascetic and Sannāyāsi orders for the primitive and backward peoples. The increasing

economic pressure and agricultural unemployment have also led to the crowding of the fourth Sannyāsarama with a large number of recruits that take to it for subsistence. Thus the noblest and holiest āsrama now completely fails to serve its functions in the present society. Such failure of the proselytising social mission of the Sannayāsis, coupled with the inevitable reaction of the modern great contemplative saints living aloof from the toil and moil and suffering of the multitude, is most unfortunate in the present period of social Europeanisation and lapse of the higher values of life. For it is only the intellectual and contemplative leaders among the monks that can lead a movement once again against formalism in religion and caste, and re-establish the pure metaphysical varna theory against both ancient caste and modern class. The Indian philosophy of life can indeed be brought most effectively within the reach of the people only by the Sannyāsi order.

Caste and Religious Reformation of the Middle Ages

The vast, swelling tide of religious reformation, of which Rāmānuja was the fore-runner, and which

resembled and even eclipsed the movements led by Buddha and Mahavira, swept throughout the length and the breadth of the country for four centuries in the middle ages and disseminated a new gospel of equality and brotherhood. The movement first articulated itself in the South where the poets and mystics of Saivism and Vaishanavism proclaimed social equality and decried the rigours and injustices of caste. Tiru Mular (about 1000 A.D.) declared that there is only one God, one caste. Similarly Nammaivar said that caste cannot make one person high or low; it is only the knowledge of God that can make that distinction. Pattakiriar similarly longed for the brotherhood of man in the following words: "When shall our race be one great brotherhood, unbroken by the tyranny of caste which Kapil in early days understood and taught what men once were in times once passed."[1] As the religious movement spread to the North, it had a more significant social levelling influence due to the relative absence of caste rigidity and association with the development of various vernacular literatures. Like Pali for the

1 Carpenter : *Theism in Mediaeval India* pp. 369—382.

spread of Buddhism, the vernaculars became the media for the dissemination of the various Bhakti cults. Well did Kabir observe: "Sanskrit is like confined well-water; the vernacular of the masses is like a flowing stream." Mysticism, literature and art all contributed to make the lives of the masses richer and fuller. In Northern India the sponsor of the Vaishnava movement was Rāmānanda of Prayag who flourished until the first decade of the fifteenth century. He admitted into the Bairagi order persons belonging to all castes. Thus kings, untouchables and Muslims were all brought together under the same devotional fold. The spirit of the new movement was embodied in his saying, "Let nobody inquire into one's caste; whosoever in love remembers God is His own." The Bhavishya Furāna remarks that due to the influence of Rāmānanda many Mlecchas or Muslims have become Vaishnavas "with the Tulsi rosary on their necks, the name of Rāma in their tongues and the insignias on their forechead. They were called samyogis or the re-mited and found near Ajodhya[1]. Many were the mystics and saints

[1] *Bhavishya Purana IV* ch. 21, 52—53, quoted by Barthwal: *The Nirguna School of Hindi Poetry*, P 13.

thrown off by the working classes and even the untouchable castes, such as Nandā of Chidambaram, Kabir, the Moslem weaver, Dādu, the cotton-cleaner, Sadhanā, the butcher (who used the salagram for weighing meat), Dhannā the Jat and Ravidas, the leather-worker; and again, Nāmadeva, the tailor, Gorā, the potter, Samvata, the gardener, Narahari, the goldsmith, Chokhā, the outcaste, Janābai the maid-servant, Sena the barber and Kānhopātra the dancing girl—all these latter of Maharashtra just as centuries ago the barber Upāli and the sweeper Sunitā rose to honour in Buddhism.

The deity in this mystical movement was the personal God to whom there was complote self-surrender, whether Krishna or Rāma Chandra, Vithova, Siva or the mother Goddess; but again and again the worshipper found his knowledge and devotion merging in the impersonal Brahman. Like 'Plutarch's 'Lives' for Western Europe, the 'Bhaktamāla' or the Rosary of Saints (Bhaktas) of the Reformation in the middle ages have moulded the ideals of the masses in India. Many were common men and

women, sinners, drunkards and wordly persons, who abandoned all they had for God and showed most unflinching courage, determination and devotion.

There were queen-poets like Mirābāi of Mewar, who abandoned her palace as she could not bear animal sacrifices and wandered from forest to forest, restless with the anguish of separation from her blue-complexioned Spouse, and singing devotional songs that still draw tears of love from thousands, and Ganesha Darani of Orcha, who suffered in silence the agony of a wound inflicted by a mad ascetic lest her husband take revenge. There were also humble women like Jānabāi, the sweet, angelic maid-servant of Nāmadeva and the penitent Indian Magdalenes, the dancing girl, Kānhopatra of Pandharpur who became intoxicated with the love of Vithova and ultimately preferred death to ravishment by the King of Bedar, and the courtesan of Delhi who dedicated the only art she knew *viz.* dancing to the love of God. There were great singers and minstrels: Tulsidas, regarded by many as the greatest poet that India has produced, who

marvellously combines the lyrical intensity and sweetness of bhakti with profound metaphysical knowledge and moral fervour, still attracting thousands of householders, mystics and saints in Northern India; Sūrdās, the blind poet of Brajabhumi with his devotional songs of intense emotional tenderness depicting the varied nunces of love; and his seven other fellow bhakta-poets, designated as the Ashtachhap poets of Hindi literature whose devotional hymns were dedicated to Krishna; Tukārām, born of a poor farmer's family, ruined by famine and chastised by his wife, who became one of the greatest poets of Maharashtra; and Chaturbhuja who preached his religion of love among the aboriginal Gonds. There were also the heroes and heroines of bhakti: Surasuri, whose chastity was protected by a tiger; Vilvamangal, who in order to eradicate his lust plucked out his offending eyes; and the unknown king who for a similar reason cut off his right hand. The love of God that passeth all understanding produced indeed immortal bards, heroes and angels from among the common men and women of India; and today thousands of people

go out as pilgrims to their shrines in adoration and worship.

But by the beginning of the 18th century the mystical movement and the mass protest against priesthoods, ceremonials and caste differences exhausted themselves. This was largely the consequence of the tolerant, eclectic character of Indian culture. The Protestant movement was assimilated into the social order through the formation of a large number of religious sects and castes, many of which have become endogamous. On the organisational side, each sect has its lay and ascetic community; the latter leads the life of Sannyāsa and takes charge of spiritual leadership and guidance. Within the boundaries of the sects and castes, the masses can practise their own devotions and rituals in their own way undisturbed by orthodox regulations and injunctions.

Just as centures ago during the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, out of the Bodhisattva ideal of compassion, sacrifice and service emerged the notion of the Community of the Buddhas on the earth, similarly the Bhakti ideal of the middle ages also

yielded the conception of the Community of the Bhaktas. Says Jñānesvara, "In their hearts they (the devotees of God) have become one with Me. I have become their life. By the force of their realization, they have forgotten life and death. By the power of that great illumination they dance with the happiness of communion. They now give to each other illumination of self, and nothing else." But such communion unfortunately remains today confined to the particular religious sect or order and cannot build up the Community of the People, as Mahāyanā Buddhism and Sankara Vedantism could build up.

Instances of rebellion of a religious sect against the steel frame of caste are represented by the Kabirpanthis, the Satnamis and the Lingayets. Kabir was a weaver and Ghāsidās, the founder of the Satnamis, was a chamar. Both these two sects insist upon the equality of all men and abolition of the caste system and have neither temples nor any gods and goddesses except the supreme God. Similarly the Lingayets are strongly opposed to caste and priesthood and worship one supreme God, Siva.

Mysticism and the Transfiguration of Familial Values and Virtues

Another result of the mystical movement is that the common people of India from Bengal to Kashmir and from Madras to Gujarat today participate in common devotional ideas and images that are largely derived from family and other primary group bonds and loyalties in rural culture, and that have easily migrated from one region and vernacular to another, renovated by direct, intuitive experience of the Real and the Universal. Across the fields, marts and cattle-tracks of India can be heard the poignant cry of the Universal in man for Divine companionship, and in poetry and song, sung by unknown wandering minstrels, boatmen or tillers of the soil, are expressed the bitter anguish of the soul in its separation from God, and the insatiable craving for union, with all their varied nuances of grief, expectancy and joy that ever melt and flow through the throbbing heart of the rural masses of India.

The self-surrendering, loving faith of Bhakti has brought about a profound psychological change—

the transformation and consecration of everyday human relationship as the symbol or vehicle of the highest spiritual values. The various Bhakti cults have seized and transfigured every major familial relationship, such as the parent-child relation, the relation of companionship and the man-woman relation into an approach to the Deity. Thus not merely man but every human relationship become symbols and modes of approach to the Lord with their specific human-cum-spiritual love patterns and emotions (rasas), such as resignation (sānta), obedience (dāsya), companionship (sakhya), paternal tenderness (vātsalya) and, finally, conjugal love (mādhurya) which represents the last and the most "glorious" (ujjala) communion with the Deity. The Deity as the Father, as the Mother, as the Friend and Companion, as the Chief and as the Beloved accordingly transmutes, intensifies and canalises human loves and affections into beyond-human channels. Chastity, fidelity, conjugal love, brotherliness, compassion, obedience and sacrifice become sacred not merely as human loyalties—sublimest flowers of rural civilisation, but also as the ultimate

and universal values beckoning and directing human beings to the transendental'[1].

Such trans-human values become inexhaustible in each single relationship with infinite range and depth that over-reach man's lives; while springing as these do from different human relationships these merge together as in an ocean of undifferentiated joy (ānandam), love and beauty (sundaram), freed from any human or social context. On the one hand, the family life supplies to religion its concrete symbols of devotion to God. On the other hand, mystical consciousness in which the human and the divine love-patterns easily slip into each other strengthens familial values and virtues, and contributes towards reinforcement of social bonds and social integration. Obedience to the parents, piety for the ancestors, attachment between the married couples and tenderness for the young ones, all partake of the nature of rituals, sanctified by religion, ennobled by art and conserved by tradition in India. Thus religion gives back to society through the infinite, ideal varie-

1 See my *Theory and Art of Mysticism*, pp. 140-145, and *The Social Structure of Values*.

gation and enrichment of satisfactions and values and integration and fixation of norms of so ial relationships more than it obtains from the familiar and universal domestic values and virtues.

The Two Major Ways of Knowledge and Love

The way of knowledge, renunciation and yoga is ancient in India. Its realization and appreciation of the Universal Self and of the Universal Community, of the spiritual oneness of mankind is of profound import to the modern world that wants to build up a universalist ethical system as the secure foundation of the United Nations Organisation. Swami Vivekananda, Swami Rama Tirtha, Sri Ramana Maharshi, and Sri Aurobindo, all have treaded on this most ancient way. The way of work, love and bhakti is a relatively modern road, trodden by the mystics and saints of the recent past, although the first Bhāgvata was Sri Krishna himself, son of Devakī, one of the seers of the Upanishads and pupils of Ghora Angirasa. According to the Mahābhārata, the Bhāgvata or the Nārayaniya

religion was traditionally handed down by Vivasvan to Manu and by Manu to Iksvaku. It is the same religion which is elucidated in the Bhagavad Gīta, and which influenced the genesis of devotion and worship in the contemporary Mahāyānist thought, characterised by the stress of both compassion and charity, and an intense feeling of personal devotion (sraddhā or bhakti) to Buddha as the saviour of mankind. The appreciation of the eternal and universal values of Beauty, Love, and Goodness and profound ecstasy, associated with the second way, set at rest the struggle between individual and social loyalties, between individual and super-individual values, which the various Western ethical systems have often found so difficult to harmonise. In each case what India stands for is not intellectualism, formal theology and religious routine but true religious mysticism and experimentation which is a dynamic force of social impulsion. What has been renovating in the field of religion in India is the rediscovery of the essential and eternal truth and Dharma, what has been socially levelling or egalitarian is not religious rationalism but ardent mysticism. Mysticism by its creativeness and transfiguration of life has from epoch to epoch revised class and caste hierarchy in India through bringing into the consciousness of the people the theory and norm of stratified spiritual status (chāturvarnya), that challenges the recurrent separatist trends in society. Once again it will strengthen the normal, egalitarian trends of indi.iduals and groups, hased on Dharma and the spiritual view of humanity, give faith, freedom and goodness to the people, and provide the ground for social justice in the new economic and political set up.

Socialism and Caste

The modern world's rising tide of humanistic, egalitarian revolution, Socialism, has reached the shores of India and dominates today the mind and spirit of her intellectuals. India cannot be true to her spiritual and social destiny unless she can assimilate Socialism to her ancient metaphysical tradition and ideal of spiritual status, holding in balance specialisation and integration and the economic and spiritual values of life. Not Socialism as an offshoot of scientific and historical



materialism, still less as a movement of class struggle and domination but as the social and economie counterpart of true equalisation, breathing the spirit of man's consciousness of complete identity with fellowman into the bones and marrows of soceity, this is Indian Socialism. And this should be planned and fostered as an organic part of our cultural heritage, with the realisation in the sociol mind of an organic and spiritual ordering of society, based on a graduated standard of culture and sociality and dignity of labour for all.

The most stupendous ideological obstacle against a Socialistic programme for the common man in India is the spirit and tradition of caste superiority and exclusiveness. India must recognise that by the third quarter of the twentieth century the so-called backward and depressed tribes and castes will constitute more than one-fifth of her population, half of whom are today no better than serfs and bond-slaves. A programme of social equalisation including the abolition of all caste barriers and regulations in social intercourse so that neither among the upper nor among

the lower castes no sense of rank and prestige could accrue due to birth and kinship, should be sponsored. The rigidity of caste and class based on heredity, and wealth is against the true, philosophical meaning of varna defined by such universally accepted texts as the Mahābhārata, Bhagavad Gīta and Bhāgvata Purāna and indeed, against the spirit and genius of Indian culture. There are some areas in India where the upper castes today intermarry, and where untouchability is unknown or stamped out from the traditional social structure. But everywhere social ostracism checkmates the abolition of restrictions in respect of marriage and of social mobility, intercourse and recognition of groups and communities labelled as inferior. The social reform movements led Rammohon Roy and the Brahma Samaj and Dayananda Saraswati and the Arya Samaj have not been able to quell the spirit of caste. Recently the all-India Hindu Mahasabha has declared that "whereas the caste system based on birth as at present existing is manifestly contrary to universal truth and morals, whereas it is the very antithesis of the fundamental spirit of the Hindu religion, whereas it flouts the

elementary rights of human equality, it declares its uncompromising opposition to the system, and calls upon Hindu society to put a speedy end to it." But the caste spirit and tradition die hard. Caste pride and chauvinism are strongly entrenched in our life and thought due to our political subjection with its perils of social conquest. But now that political freedom is won what is described as the defensive reaction of the social "tortoise" must be consciously combated by social reform and legislation, aided by a similar religious-mystical egalitarian movement that India had witnessed before under the leadership of Rāmānanda, Nānak, Kabir, Chaitanya, Tukāram and others.

That movement waxing stronger and stronger for several centuries is alas checkmated by the new economism, technology and class stratification. It is still at once the aim and despair of all great modern educationists and reformers. The spirit of Rammohon, Dayananda, Vivekananda, Rama Tirtha and Mahatma Gandhi feeds the inspiration of the social egalitarian movement. This is most necessary adjunct of Indian Socialism for

raising the lower castes and orders slowly and surely towards the realisation of that great ancient spiritual ideal of *Homo communis*, the non-resisting, worshipful, real Common man, who lives, works and suffers in all men. From this basic metaphysical notion of immanence of Deity in man and in every human relation can emerge the new moral imperatives: "Each for All", "All for Each" and "All with All".

A Humane and Compassionate Indian Socialism

India, true to her ancient humanism and modern democratic ideal, cannot force Socialism upon the people by the downright expropriation of Indian capitalists, landlords and tulakas. Her techniques of adoption of Socialism will be moral, non-violent, grounded in a kind of equality and fraternity that looks beyond organised economics and politics to trans-social ultimate values. She cannot introduce, if she is true to the teaching of non-violence of Gandhiji, a classless society by burning one class at the stake of another or burying it underground as had been done in Eastern Europe. Socialism here will be a humanised Indian variety. May it not be

that with our heritage of a non-violent, compassionate culture we shall be able, as the decades pass, to develop and present for world acceptance an Indian brand of Socialism, a Socialism not merely scientific and technological, but also humane and humanitarian? Nor can Indian Socialism demand from the individual that unconditional surrender to the State which is rooted in social utility or economic purpose. Obviously it cannot override the essential and unassailable liberties of the individual, grounded in spheres of spiritual values that are outside both the individual and the community. At the same time it will sustain and fulfil much better than Western Socialism the inherent dignity and majesty of the Common Man.

The Common Man is *Homo communis*—which truly refers to the Universal and Eternal Man in all men (sarvabhutātman), and not to the biological and economic man or workman, the fractionalised and mutilated, and hence baffled and aggressive person whose aim and purpose now seem to regulate the entire course of modern Western civilisation. *Homo*

communis is not the mass-man, but *Homo universus*. He is "not the God with four hands but the Universal Man with infinite hands", as observes Kabir. "He has hands and feet in all directions; eyes, heads, mouths and ears everywhere. He is immanent in the world, possessing the vast whole", say the Upanishad and the Bhagavad Gita.

India's ancient and essential egalitarian ideal springs from the conception of the immanent divinity in every man and in every human relation. A most vivid and profound ancient formulation of the law of dharma or justice is found in the exposition of the Doctrine of Elixir (Madhu-Vidyā) in the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad. "This justice (Dharma), which directs the universe and society and the aggregate of human body and its organs, which is practised by the people and controls even the kings, is the elixir of all beings and all beings are its elixir. That resplendent, immortal Man—Brahman—who is in this Justice is born of this Justice; He, born of this Justice is within you. He is just the Self of yours, the Immortal, this All."[1] The truly Indian egalita-

1 *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, II, 5, 11.

and announce to the king or his minister: Behold, sir, and learn what I have seen! And, having told him he were to invite the king to rebuild that city, and that city were to become anon flourishing and populous and wealthy once more:—Even so, brethren, have I seen an ancient Road, trodden by Buddhas of a bygone age the which having followed, I understand life, and its coming to be and its passing away. And thus understanding I have declared the same to the fraternity and to the laity, so that the holy life flourishes and is spread abroad once more, well propagated among men."

May not the present seers of India similarly explore and rediscover the ancient Road, the unknown City and the ruined Mansion of God, trodden and occupied by the seers of bygone ages and rebuild these for the forgotten Man, our Common Man so that his life becomes enriched, ennobled and sanctified?

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